

# **WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

1. A computer implemented method for enabling perception of a video clip in an instant messaging communications session, the method comprising:

5 storing on a host system one or more video clips;

receiving a request at the host system for a selected video clip to be delivered to an instant messaging participant system;

accessing the selected video clip stored at the host system; and

communicating the selected video clip from the host system to the instant messaging participant system for rendering in an instant messaging application running on the instant messaging participant system.

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2. The method of claim 1 in which receiving the request comprises receiving a request for a video clip selected by an instant message sender.

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3. The method of claim 1 in which receiving the request comprises receiving a request that is generated in response to a communication from an instant messaging sender system to the instant messaging participant system.

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4. The method of claim 1 in which receiving the request comprises receiving an identifier enabling identification of the selected video clip.

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5. The method of claim 4 in which receiving the identifier further comprises receiving an identifier comprising a location on the host system of the selected video clip.

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6. The method of claim 5 in which the identifier further comprises a file name.

7. The method of claim 4 wherein receiving the identifier comprises receiving an identifier created for the selected video clip based upon the application of an algorithm to at least a portion of the selected video clip.

8. The method of claim 4 in which receiving the identifier comprises receiving the identifier in response to a communication from an instant messaging sender system to the instant messaging participant system.

5           9. The method of claim 1 in which the host comprises a server authorized as a partner to an instant messaging host.

10           10. The method of claim 1 in which storing the video clips comprises storing one or more still photographs and a sound track.

11. The method of claim 1 in which storing the video clips comprises storing an animation sequence.

15           12. The method of claim 1 in which storing the video clips comprises storing one or more video clips configured to expire upon the occurrence of a predetermined event.

13. The method of claim 12 in which the predetermined event comprises passage of a predetermined length of time or the passage of a predetermined date.

20           14. The method of claim 12 in which the predetermined event comprises a predetermined number of uses.

25           15. The method of claim 12 further comprising:  
determining whether the video clip has expired, and  
disallowing access to the video clip if the video clip has expired.

30           16. The method of claim 1 further comprising:  
determining whether the video clip has been banned, and  
disallowing access to the video clip if the video clip has been banned.

17. The method of claim 16 in which determining whether the video clip has been banned comprises determining whether the video clip has been banned based on a report by a user.

5           18. The method of claim 16 in which determining whether the video clip has been banned comprises determining whether the video clip has been banned based on a violation of a term of a service agreement.

10           19. The method of claim 1 further comprising determining whether the selected video clip is an official item; and displaying the selected video clip if the video clip is an official item.

            20. The method of claim 1 wherein:  
             storing on the host system comprises storing on the host system one or more video  
 15      clips associated with an instant messaging application operator; and  
             receiving the request comprises receiving the request at the host system for a selected video clip to be delivered to an instant messaging participant system, the video clip being selected by the instant messaging application operator.

20           21. The method of claim 1 further comprising receiving at the host system one or more video clips from an instant messaging sender system.

            22. The method of claim 1 further comprising determining capabilities of the instant messaging participant at the host system, and in which accessing the selected video clip  
 25      comprises determining an appropriate version from one or more versions of the selected video clip based upon the determined capabilities and accessing the appropriate version of the selected video clip.

30           23. The method of claim 20 in which determining capabilities comprises determining a data connection speed of the instant messaging participant system.

24. The method of claim 20 wherein determining capabilities comprises identifying hardware associated with the instant messaging participant system.

25. The method of claim 20 wherein determining capabilities comprises identifying software associated with the instant messaging participant system.

26. A computer implemented method for enabling perception of a video clip in an instant messaging communications session, the method comprising:

rendering, on an instant messaging recipient system, an instant messaging application user interface for an instant messaging communications session involving at least an instant message recipient and an instant message sender;

receiving a message that includes a video clip identifier corresponding to a selected video clip to be displayed by the instant messaging recipient system, the video clip being selected by the instant message sender at an instant messaging sender system;

automatically accessing the selected video clip based on the video clip identifier; and rendering the selected video clip at the instant messaging recipient system.

27. A computer program, stored on a computer readable medium, the computer program comprising instructions for:

storing on a host system one or more video clips;

receiving a request at the host system for a selected video clip to be delivered to an instant messaging participant system;

accessing the selected video clip stored at the host system; and

communicating the selected video clip from the host system to the instant messaging participant system for rendering in an instant messaging application running on the instant messaging participant system.

28. The computer program of claim 27 in which instructions for receiving the request comprises instructions for receiving a request for a video clip selected by an instant message sender.

29. The computer program of claim 27 in which instructions for receiving the request comprises instructions for receiving a request that is generated in response to a communication from an instant messaging sender system to the instant messaging participant system.

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30. The computer program of claim 27 in which instructions for receiving the request comprises instructions for receiving an identifier enabling identification of the selected video clip.

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31. The computer program of claim 30 in which instructions for receiving the identifier further comprises instructions for receiving an identifier comprising a location on the host system of the selected video clip.

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32. The computer program of claim 31 in which the identifier further comprises a file name.

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33. The computer program of claim 30 wherein instructions for receiving the identifier comprises instructions for receiving an identifier created for the selected video clip based upon the application of an algorithm to at least a portion of the selected video clip.

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34. The computer program of claim 30 in which instructions for receiving the identifier comprises instructions for receiving the identifier in response to a communication from an instant messaging sender system to the instant messaging participant system.

35. The computer program of claim 27 in which the host system comprises a server authorized as a partner to an instant messaging host.

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36. The computer program of claim 27 in which instructions for storing the video clips comprises instructions for storing one or more still photographs and a sound track.

37. The computer program of claim 27 in which instructions for storing the video clips comprises instructions for storing an animation sequence.

38. The computer program of claim 27 in which instructions for storing the video clips comprises instructions for storing one or more video clips configured to expire upon the occurrence of a predetermined event.

39. The computer program of claim 38 in which the predetermined event comprises passage of a predetermined length of time or the passage of a predetermined date.

40. The computer program of claim 38 in which the predetermined event comprises a predetermined number of uses.

41. The computer program of claim 38 further comprising instructions for:  
determining whether the video clip has expired, and  
disallowing access to the video clip if the video clip has expired.

42. The computer program of claim 27 further comprising instructions for:  
determining whether the video clip has been banned, and  
disallowing access to the video clip if the video clip has been banned.

43. The computer program of claim 42 in which instructions for determining whether the video clip has been banned comprises instructions for determining whether the video clip has been banned based on a report by a user.

44. The computer program of claim 42 in which instructions for determining whether the video clip has been banned comprises instructions for determining whether the video clip has been banned based on a violation of a term of a service agreement.

45. The computer program of claim 27 further comprising instructions for:  
determining whether the selected video clip is an official item; and

displaying the selected video clip if the video clip is an official item.

46. The computer program of claim 27 wherein:

instructions for storing on the host system comprises instructions for storing on the  
5 host system one or more video clips associated with an instant messaging application  
operator; and

instructions for receiving the request comprises instructions for receiving the request  
at the host system for a selected video clip to be delivered to an instant messaging participant  
system, the video clip being selected by an instant messaging sender.

10 47. The computer program of claim 27 further comprising instructions for receiving  
at the host system one or more video clips from an instant messaging sender system.

48. The computer program of claim 27 further comprising instructions for  
15 determining capabilities of the instant messaging participant at the host system, and in which  
instructions for accessing the selected video clip comprises instructions for determining an  
appropriate version from one or more versions of the selected video clip based upon the  
determined capabilities and accessing the appropriate version of the selected video clip.

20 49. The computer program of claim 46 in which instructions for determining  
capabilities comprises instructions for determining a data connection speed of the instant  
messaging participant.

50. The computer program of claim 46 wherein instructions for determining  
25 capabilities comprises instructions for identifying hardware associated with the instant  
messaging participant.

51. The computer program of claim 46 wherein instructions for determining  
capabilities comprises instructions for identifying software associated with the instant  
30 messaging participant.

52. A computer program, stored on a computer readable medium, the computer program comprising instructions for:

rendering, on an instant messaging recipient system, an instant messaging application user interface for an instant messaging communications session involving at least an instant message recipient and an instant message sender;

receiving a message that includes a video clip identifier corresponding to a selected video clip to be displayed by the instant messaging recipient system, the video clip being selected by the instant message sender at an instant messaging sender system;

automatically accessing the selected video clip based on the video clip identifier; and rendering the selected video clip at the instant messaging recipient system.